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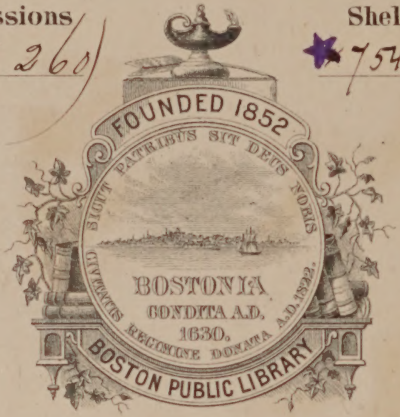

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A

DISCOURSE

Occasioned by the Death

OF

DEACON DANIEL FISK:

WHO DIED APRIL 23, 1840,

AGED LXIX.

BY REV. BENJAMIN WOOD,

Pastor of the Church in Upton.

BOSTON:

DUTTON AND WENTWORTH'S PRINT.

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A DISCOURSE.

JOB V. 26.

THOU SHALT COME TO THY GRAVE IN A FULL AGE, LIKE AS A SHOCK OF CORN COMETH IN HIS SEASON.

How affecting is death, in reference to men in general! How does it lay all their promised enjoyments in the dust! The wicked is *driven away* in his wickedness. Unwilling to abandon a world which has been the scene of his activity, he is terrified at the righteous character of his judge, and at the purity of that law, by which he must be tried. To what part of the universe can the impenitent, in the hour of death, look for consolation? On the earth he is forbid to remain. He leaves the world, under the guilt of all his sins, and in possession of that temper, in the exercise of which they were committed, he is called to his final reckoning.

But, how very different is the aspect of death, when associated with *righteousness*, and, when viewed in the

light which the word of God has thrown on the *departure* of a good man. There is, I was about to say, a sober pleasure in contemplating the death of a real christian —one that comes to his grave, *as a shock of corn cometh in his season.* The change which passes upon such a man is so glorious, that were it not for the loss the Church sustains, and the tender ties which nature has thrown about our hearts, we should almost cease to mourn. For he dies in the arms of his Saviour. His toils are ended—the ills of life are closed—his pains have ceased, and his victory won. Privileged, indeed, is the condition of those who are *ripe* for the grave in the sense of the text. How numerous, how sweet are their present mercies! How rich, how exalted are their hopes!

It shall be my object on this occasion, to consider,

I. What the dying christian is ripe *in*,

And

II. What he is ripe *for*. I am to consider,

I. What the dying christian is ripe *in*.

I answer,

1. He is ripe in years. He is, even so, if he dies young —in the morning of life. For he is called away at the best time,—at God's *appointed* time. He is, therefore, in the divine estimation, ripe in years. But the text, however, respects more particularly, the christian *old in years.* An ungodly life protracted to old age, is a dreadful sight—but length of days is promised to the people of

God, as a peculiar blessing. When Abraham had offered sacrifice to Jehovah, the Lord said to him among other things, "Thou shalt go to thy fathers in peace; thou shalt be buried in a good old age." And when the story of his death is related, *this gift* is especially noticed by the Holy Spirit, as having been bestowed upon him. And Abraham gave up the ghost, and died in a good *old age*, an old man *full of years*. All things considered, a long life is desirable. It is desirable to the families of good men,—to the church, and to societies to which they belong. It lengthens out their opportunities of doing more good in the world. The lamp of truth is borne longer in their hands, and they are enabled to a greater extent to glorify their Father who is in heaven.

2. The dying christian is ripe in *usefulness*. He has not lived *wholly* in vain. He has been God's witness for the truth, by making a public profession of the religion of Christ. And, for this reason, among others, it may be, he has been kept out of the eternal kingdom, lingering awhile upon the earth, for the express purpose of holding forth *the word of life*. But after all, when the christian looks back upon past life, he feels that he has abundant reason to exclaim, "O my leanness, my leanness! I have been an unprofitable servant! How little have I done for Christ, who has done so much for me." It is said, by a certain divine, "that there is, indeed, an old age that is not desirable, even though he be a christian. It is when the af-

fections have grown cold—when all the energies are dried up—when the body seems to have survived the soul—and when nothing remains to the man but the shadow of his former self."

But O, how is *he* honored, and how is Christ honored by him, who is allowed to retain his energies and his ability for usefulness to old age ; and all these consecrated to the service of God, in promoting the interest of the Redeemer's kingdom. How useful is such a christian. How do others look on, and take knowledge of him, that he has been with Jesus. There is something truly noble in such a spectacle ; it is like the oak which sustains its station on the top of the mountain, defying the storms—or like the palm-tree on which the tempest has no influence —or like the cedar of Lebanon, growing and flourishing century after century. Thus it is with many of the righteous. They flourish even in old age. Their path is that of the just, which shines brighter and brighter, and their hands waxing stronger and stronger. Difficulties he expects to encounter, and to suffer trials ; but none of these things move him, neither counts he his life dear to himself, so that he may finish his course with joy. The cost of his undertaking has been counted, his decision for eternity formed ; and, with entire willingness, he meets the consequences, he continues steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord.

I add, once more,

3. The dying christian is ripe in a *preparedness* to depart. He has set his house in order, like the man expecting to take a long journey. He has made his peace with God, upon the terms of the gospel. A man in the heat of battle may rush forward to death with a bold and hardy daring; but the christian does this with calm and sober reflection. He knows that it is a solemn thing to die. In the exercise of faith, he can exclaim, with Job, "I know that my Redeemer liveth." With what exultation did the Apostle Paul stand on the brink of Jordan? While he looked backward on the past, and cast his eye on what was yet before him, he says to his beloved Timothy, "I am now *ready* to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand; I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith; henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day; and not to me only, but unto all them that love his appearing."

This *preparedness* to depart involves in it, a great moral change. It is a change of the heart. It is not the mere exercise of the understanding. It is not a mere set of opinions. It is not a mere round of lifeless ceremonies. O, it is a deep thing of the soul. It has much to do with the affections and motives; and exerts a renovating influence over all the springs of *moral* action. It consists in that holiness of heart and life which is the fruit of repentance and faith. Show me proof of a man's peni-

tence and faith; and the gospel bids me hope for him. But tell me merely of a man's *willingness to die;* and the gospel bids me say nothing, till I have inquired for the *reason* of this willingness. It was, my hearers, a clear and deep-felt sense of divine truth upon their own souls, which sometimes made such men as Baxter and Edwards and Scott and Dwight, after a long life of eminent piety, approach the eternal world with more or less of the trembling of doubt and fear. They saw a holy God on the throne, and around him a world of holy beings—a world shining with the glories of holiness, and resounding with its everlasting songs. All this they saw with a full gaze of faith, while they knew and felt their own deep vileness. And beside; this *preparedness* must be made *in life.*—The corn ripens for the harvest in its season—in its *proper season,* and at no other time. Preparation for any event is something to be done previous to the event itself. It is absurd to talk of one's preparing for death when he is actually dying. There is not the least proof from the Bible, that the event which dissolves the union between the soul and the body, produces a radical change in the moral character. I ask, what is there, in the passage through the dark valley, to take the affections at once from objects, on which they have been fixed for years, and fix them on objects as different from these, as heaven is from earth. Will the man whose supreme object in life has been, to lay up treasures on the earth, find himself, the moment after death, in full possession of that inheritance which is

incorruptible? Will the man, who has drunk, all his days, at the polluted stream of this world's pleasure, be prepared as soon as he dies, to drink of that pure river of bliss, flowing from the throne of God and the Lamb? And will the man, who during his whole state of probation, has loved the praise of men more than the praise of God, find himself the moment after death standing and bowing with the adoring hosts of heaven, and ready to cast down his crown with theirs, and take up their song of blessing and honor and glory and power unto him that sitteth on the throne and to him that was slain? Is it supposable? Is it possible, from the very nature of the case? How stands the fact? Let the word of God decide, "*He that is filthy, let him be filthy still.*"

But after all, perhaps, it may be said, though the heart be not changed by the event of dying, it may be just *before that event.* I would not limit the Holy One. All things are possible with God. Through the power of divine grace there is a possibility that it may. But judging from the conduct of men who recover from alarming sickness, and from other arguments, there is most fearful reason to think, that it is very seldom the case. On the contrary, it may doubtless be received as a general truth, *that men die as they live.*

Having seen what the dying christian is ripe *in*, I will now enquire,

II. What he is ripe *for*. I answer,

1. He is ripe for that glorious *rest* which remains for the people of God in heaven. Where heaven is, we know not. It is not revealed. Yet we doubt not; we fear not. Our Saviour, by precept and example, taught us to look up, and to say, Our Father, who art in heaven. And just before he disappeared from the world, he said to his disciples, I go to my Father, and added, I will come again and receive *you* to myself. Where? *in heaven*. And the same reasonings, which lead us to expect that christians will always live, and live hereafter in some other place than this world, prompt us to regard *that place* as a place of *rest*. And for this state of rest, the christian is *prepared* to enter when he dies, for he is allied to God. He is sanctified and set apart for God, and his body is become the temple of the Holy Ghost! His sins are pardoned, his name is written in the Lamb's Book of Life.

Of the *immediate* transit of the sanctified soul to this blessed state of rest, we are not left to conjecture. Who can read the words of Christ, addressed to the dying thief, without being convinced of this truth. "I say unto thee, *this day*, shalt thou be with me in paradise. Stephen amid the pains of martyrdom, before he heaved his last sigh, had a vision of *that rest* into which he was about to enter. Lifting up his eyes to heaven, he prayed for his murderers, and died, committing his spirit into the

hands of Jesus. The words of Paul are in point. "I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and be with Christ, which is far better." Intimating, that when death brings the body to the grave, the undying soul is gathered into the garner of God. It becomes associated with angels, and with the spirits of just men made perfect in the world of bliss, and is at rest. O, sweet rest! I add,

2. The dying christian is ripe for the judgment day, and its interesting consequences. A complete deliverance in that day is the object of his hope, and the ground of *that hope*, is the promise of God. His faith rests on the words of the Apostle. "We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed." Who can conceive of the feelings of the saint, when his body is raised from the grave, and *re*-possessed by his spirit: when that which was sown a natural body, is raised a spiritual body, and fitted for all the exercises of the heavenly state. Will he remain unmoved in view of the dreadful scene? Amidst all the ruin and confusion with which he is surrounded! the melting elements —the rolling earthquake—the crackling thunder—the flashing lightning—all, all will have no influence to disturb his peace, or shake his confidence in God. While here, he was told of this day. He believed it. And he

is prepared to meet it. The books are opened. The judgment proceeds. Were a number of prisoners tried for their lives, justified by an earthly court, would not the relief of their anxiety, the gladness and the raptures of their minds, surpass description? What is this compared with pardon, with justification at the bar of God? Christians will there recollect their wanderings, their sins, and their crimes. Their sense of unworthiness and crimson guilt, sinks deep in their hearts. But they have been pardoned. Accordingly they find themselves surrounded with chosen vessels of honor. Their judge is reconciled; he is their brother, and their Saviour, for whom he bled and died. Their past sufferings are foils to set off their present prospects, their losses, their trials and tears, enhance their present felicity. Raised above the darkness, the distress and dangers of this life, they are waiting for glory and immortality. As Moses saw from Pisgah's top the land of promise, so they see in heaven, vacant seats and golden thrones, waiting their arrival. With the voice of love and grace, the judge addresses them, "Come, ye blessed, inherit the kingdom, prepared for you before the foundation of the world." Prepared, therefore, is the dying christian for the judgment and its interesting consequences. For he comes to his grave in a full age, like as a shock of corn cometh in his season.

In view of what has been said, I would remark,

1. None can reasonably deny the triumphant influence

of the Gospel. Many of us have often seen and felt this, when we have stood by the bed-side of the dying believer. For it has often *there*, imparted a peace that passeth all understanding. In that awful moment, when the soul is floating on the confines of two worlds, there is a power in the religion of Jesus, that supports and comforts it in the near view of eternity. Often have we seen the cheerful smile of contentment, under the most distressing circumstances. Amidst tears of sorrow, a mixture of hope and joy has glistened. "The cup which my Father hath given me to drink, shall I not drink it?" O, how glorious is the *power* of gospel grace. It can carry songs of joy into a prison. What a wretched system is that of infidelity, compared with this. Will its annals produce an instance of any calmness in the prospect of futurity which can at all compare with the steady hope—the anticipations of bliss—enjoyed by the people of God. It is the christian only who can say, "For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." Such have been their feelings, and such their expressions; and where this has been the case, death has generally been embraced as the messenger of peace.

2. How wide is the difference between the saint and

the sinner, at death. This difference is real and radical in the midst of life; but *then* it is not so strongly marked and prominent. Though wicked men aften *appear* like good men in seasons of prosperity, yet, when the former come to a dying bed, the mask is apt to be torn off, the deception vanishes, and their minds are filled with awful forebodings. They find themselves in an unprepared state to leave the world, and appear before their Judge.

Inspiration declares, "The wicked is driven away *in his wickedness*, but the righteous hath hope in his death." O, the difference! The one is surprised, the other is calm and quiet. The one dies unwillingly, the other exclaims, "*the will of the Lord be done.*" The one dies unreformed and impenitent, the other, reformed, renewed, and with the spirit of heaven begun in his soul. The one dies in a state of condemnation, the other in a state of justification. The one sinks into the grave in all the darkness and horrors of despair, while the other greets it as the place where the wicked cease from troubling and the weary are at rest. In a word, the one is ripe for heaven, the other is ripe for hell. In a future world this difference is represented by a gulf, wide and impassable. The reason is obvious. There is an essential difference of character.

We have met, my dear friends, to-day, on a mournful

occasion—an occasion calculated to call forth our tender sympathies. Who, present, does not feel the loss that we have sustained, in the death of Deacon Daniel Fisk? I know his family and friends feel it; the members of this church and congregation feel it. The pastor feels it. The bible class and the sabbath school feel it. Though we mourn, yet it is not so much on *his account.* For we have evidence to believe, that what is *our loss* is gain to him. He was called away, not in the morning of life, for he had almost reached his three score years and ten. He was not called suddenly away; for he was admonished months, by a wasting sickness, of his approaching dissolution. Neither was he called away under a cloud, but in the light of God's countenance. O, it was not in that darkness, which deprived his soul of peace and hope, but in that sweet, humble confidence in God, which neither the aspect of death nor the terrors of the tomb could shake. It was in a season of special revival of religion, in his native place, that his attention was called to the concerns of his soul;—and after some time of painful conviction, he indulged the hope, that he had submitted to God. He found peace in believing. He soon joined the church, and by a public profession, consecrated himself to the service of the Lord. His mind was now open for religious knowledge; and the possession of this afforded him much satisfaction. He was firmly fixed in the belief of the great and distinguishing doctrines of grace. On these he built all his hopes of

future happiness. Possessing good natural and acquired abilities, he well deserved, and he received, many tokens of public confidence and respect in the offices to which he was invited—both in a civil and military line. Twenty-eight years he served the church in the office of deacon. In times of difficulty, when darkness was round *our path*, we looked to him for advice. He mourned over our moral desolations, and rejoiced when Zion was enlarged. His house was a house of prayer. He was constant in his attendance on public worship, and by his devout attention to the solemnities of the sanctuary, he gave striking evidence, *that it was good for him to be there.* As a husband and father, he was tender and affectionate; as a friend, open, candid, honest and sincere; as a neighbor, kind and obliging. Deacon Fisk had an extended acquaintance. Being engaged for many years in the mercantile business, this led him much abroad, and was therefore known to many. But after all, those *only* who were acquainted with his private and domestic life, would justly appreciate his character. He took a great interest in the rising generation. He well knew, that the interests of both church and state would soon devolve on them. Accordingly, he was much interested in the Sabbath School, and by these pupils, he will long be remembered, as their superintendent. Feeling the value of the scriptures, he instructed a bible class, and explained to them the doctrines and duties of christianity to great advantage. And beside, he did not overlook the benevolent

enterprises of the day. These he sustained by his prayers and contributions. A few weeks before he died, he wished to partake of the Lord's Supper. This was a solemn scene. At the close of the communion, he said, "This has been a refreshing season to my soul." At times he expressed a desire to live a little longer, but then would add, "God knows what is best for me and for mine, I feel willing to leave it with him." Such a life, as we might naturally expect, would lead to a happy death. And so it did. His approaching end was contemplated with solemn interest, but with deep submission. As death advanced, his mind settled into a state of increasing calmness and joy. I was called to see him die; after prayer, a scene took place which I shall never forget. I wish I could describe it. And I shall *always* consider it as an high privilege, that I was there. It was a *farewell scene.* The dying man could speak, and was in full possession of his reason. There was a kind of celestial radiance, indicating that peace of God which passeth all understanding, a joy unspeakable. He called for all his family to his bedside. He first took his wife by the hand, and wished her many blessings; thanked her for her kindness to him, and hoped that God would be her God, both here and hereafter; he then blessed all his children, took each one by the hand, beginning with his oldest child. He reminded them of their obligations to God, what he had done for them, and what he would do for them, if they would yield obedience to his com-

mands. And among other things, the dying father reminded his children of the consolation he *then* felt, to think that he had consecrated them to God in baptism—and prayed that the God of Abraham would be their God; yes, he most affectionately commended them to him, and to the word of his grace. After having done this, he then in a most solemn manner, raised his hands and eyes to heaven, and said, *Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.* And, in a few hours after, he, like old Jacob, "gathered up his feet into the bed, and yielded up the Ghost."

To this afflicted family, let me say, there are considerations in your case, which should be effectual to *console.* The Lord hath done it. It is therefore wisely done, and done in covenant faithfulness. Will not, then, the dear partner of the deceased, submit to this trying providence? I know your heart bleeds at the loss you have sustained. Your loss is a chasm which cannot be filled up; Be sure, God's blessing on time, and occurrences may abate the irritation of the wound, but the breach remains. Bow with filial reverence before the infinite Disposer. How little of him can we comprehend; still he vouchsafes some light in this our darkness. Your dear husband has gone but a little before survivors—but a little before you—may you be prepared and ready to follow. And when called away, may you come to your grave in a full age, like as a shock of corn cometh in his season.

What words of condolence can I utter to these bereaved children. What can I add to the instructions that have so often distilled from those lips that are *now* cold in death. Your loss is great. Your head, your father is taken away. O, be thankful that you so long enjoyed his presence—his example—his prayers—his labors for your good. He has left impressions on your consciences, that will be renewed, when you meet him at the bar of God, and that will be felt through interminable ages. And even though now dead, he yet speaks. Have you forgot the *farewell scene*,—his last dying words? Impossible. They now vibrate on your ear. Be admonished, my dear young friends, to bring death and eternity near. What is your life? It is even a vapor. Look not away from the thought, that you must die. A little longer and it will all be true. A little longer, and the places that know you, shall know you no more. O, beware! Lest that last summons overtake you in some inauspicious hour. Watch ye therefore, for ye know not what hour your Lord may come. Immortal souls, live for heaven. Another life is before you. If you are wise, you may welcome it with joy.

The brothers and sisters of the deceased, already know what duty is—how they ought to feel, and how they ought to act under this trying providence. They will do, I trust, as did the disciples of Christ on a mournful occasion. They had lost a beloved brother. After having

committed the body to the grave, they went and told Jesus.

God, to-day, is speaking to all the relatives associated with this afflicted family. The voice he utters is, "*Be ye also ready.*" Prepare to die. Death will come. Up, then, and strive to enter in at the straight gate, and pursue the narrow way that leads to life. There is no time to be lost. What you do, must be done quickly. Behold the judge standeth at the door.

I need not remind the members of this church, that we have lost a beloved brother—one who has borne the vessels of the Lord, at our communion seasons for many years. Yes, around this altar of God, we have often sat, and drank the cup of salvation. He felt for this church, and flock. He carried his solicitude for us in his closet, and up to his dying chamber. He bore us on his heart, when he struggled with the king of terrors. Could he bend from those eternal scenes with which he is now encompassed, O, how would he expostulate with us, urging to more fidelity and watchfulness, and in what accents of tenderness would he speak to the thoughtless sinner.

It will not be improper, if I were here to say, that I do in a special manner, feel the loss of Deacon Fisk. In the youthful period of life, we put on the harness together. He was the first male member, to whom I was

introduced, after coming here to preach. At *that time* we formed a pleasing acquaintance. This continued, and was never for a single moment interrupted to my knowledge. He was *always* ready to stand in his lot—to assist me when feeble in health, and to take from my shoulder any burden that was in his power. And I never felt the need of his assistance, in years gone by, so much as I now do. I have reason to bless God, that he has been spared so long, and that although, he is called away, the life of the other dear Brother,* is spared, with whom Deacon Fisk and myself have walked together for more than forty years.

A word to this dying assembly, and I have done. You have been preparing to live, *now prepare to die.* Will you not receive instruction by these funeral solemnities. That voice which you have often heard in prayer in this house, is now silent in death. It will soon be so with you. We shall all be dead. Yes, these bodies shall be lifeless; but the spirit that animates them, where shall it be! Where shall be the immortal soul? Shining as an angel of light before the throne of God, or wailing in the blackness of despair! Behold now is the accepted time, behold now is the day of salvation.

* Deacon Samuel Forbush.

THIS SELECT HYMN WAS SUNG

AT THE

Funeral of Deacon Fisk.

1. The Christian Pilgrim did depart,
   Departs without a sigh,
   Fear can no longer chill his heart,
   Nor sorrow dim his eye.

2. In heaven's own garments see him stand
   On death's much dreaded shore,
   He gazes on the promised land,
   And seems already o'er.

3. We saw him oft betray a fear,
   As near this flood he drew;
   But now a willing pilgrim here,
   He kindles at the view.

4. A ray hath broke from Canaan's land
   Across that sullen flood;
   It bids him quit its mortal strand,
   And onward march to God.

5. He marches on, for now his eye
Hath lost life's lurid ray,
As suns which quit a clouded sky
To shine in brighter day.

6. O, could we catch one moment's view
Of what he now must know,
Sorrow would fill our spirits too,
To linger thus below.

(June, 1889, 20,000)

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